

N^o 20
*The Use and Abuse of Philosophy in Mat-
ters of Religion, briefly consider'd.*

I N A
S E R M O N

Preach'd at the Parish-Church

O F

BISHOP'S-STORTFORD,

I N

Hertfordshire, Aug. 22. 1710.

A T T H E

Annual Meeting of the Scholars
Educated at that School.

Publish'd at the Request of the Stewards, Gentle-
men and Clergy there present.

By *WILLIAM LUNN*, M. A. and Rector of
Elsworth, in the County of *Cambridge*.

L O N D O N:

Printed for *JOHN WTAT*, at the Rose in St. Paul's
Church-Yard. 1711.

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SERMON

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T O
ROBERT ELWES, Esq;

A N D
JOHN YARDLEY, M. D.

Stewards of the School-Feast;

A N D T O
The Rest of the Gentlemen and
Clergy there present,

T H I S
S E R M O N

Is most humbly Dedicated.

ROBERT FAWCETT Esq.

JOHN TARDLEY M.D.

Stewards of the School-Board;

The Rell of the Gentlemen and
Clergy there present.

SEE R. M. O. N.

kindly Dedicated

A
S E R M O N
P R E A C H ' D

At Bishop's-Stortford, &c.

C O L O S. II. 8.

*Beware lest any Man spoil you through Philosophy
and vain Deceit.*

AS there was in the Apostles Days, so 'tis very plain there is in ours, a Generation of Men, or Vipers, shall I call them? Who, under the specious Pretence of instructing the Sons of Men in the Rudiments of Philosophy, and *Science fasly so call'd*, take great Pains to unteach them the Principles of Reveal'd Religion, as contradictory to those of Natural Reason, which Divine Providence has kindly made the Characteristick of Human Nature, and consequently, altogether unworthy the Notice of such rational Agents, as act upon more noble Principles, than to be choused out of their Reason by dull Priestcraft, or perswaded into the Belief of Contradiction, mysterious Stuff, and unintelligible Nonsense, as some of them, who are so full of Sense, that they have no Room left for Manners, have no less impudently, than impiously blas-

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blaspheme'd the most sacred Mysteries of our Religion. And considering, that vain Men would be wise; that they are proud of being rational, and so conceited of their own Abilities, as to think they are capable of understanding every thing, no Wonder, if they thereupon presently set up for themselves, make their own weak Judgment, and silly Phancy, the Standard of their Lives, and resolve to believe nothing which their shallow Understanding can't fully fathom and comprehend, nor to do any thing which their own Reason would not of it self, and by it self, without any Dependence upon Revelation and Divine Authority, have prescrib'd to them as necessary, or convenient: Nor need it seem more strange to us, that such great Pretenders to Reason and Knowledge, should so easily impose upon the conceited Part of the World, under the Notion of teaching them to philosophize, to act like Men of rational Faculties; or, (as the subtle old Serpent wheedled our First Parents) *to be as Gods, knowing Good and Evil*. Thus, that crafty old Sophister imposed upon our poor Progenitors, even in Paradise it self, and thus his Atheistical Disciples, have endeavour'd to deceive their unhappy Posterity almost ever since, inculcating to them such Maxims as these, *viz.* That it is impossible, that any thing should be produc'd out of nothing; that an incorporeal Substance is a Contradiction in the Nature of things; that if there were any such thing as an Immaterial Being, yet it could not be suppos'd to act upon a Material, &c. All which, they lay down as absolute and self-evident Principles, to be believ'd without any Restriction or Limitation whatsoever; which being by them taken for granted, they are presently thereupon, for reasoning the Infinite and Spiritual Creator of all things, out of his own World, and ascribe the curious and wonderful Architecture of it to the fortuitous Concurrence of unthinking Atoms, which moving for some time,

time promiscuously and confusedly in the immense *Vacuum*, at length jumbled themselves into this beautiful Frame.

But these Underminers of the very Foundation of all Religion in general, are not the only vain Philosophers in the World, which we are to take Heed of; no, there is another Sect of them amongst us, professing Christianity in their own Sense, whom it will no less behove us to beware of: I mean, such as pretend to own the Excellency and Necessity of the moral Part of Religion, and to allow the Scriptures, or at least, some part of them, to be Sacred and Authentick; yet, at the same time, are so highly conceited of their own Reason, as in some Measure to prefer it before Divine Revelation, not thinking themselves obliged to believe any thing therein contain'd, that seems contrary to, or which is the same thing with them, above their own Sense of things; and whenever they meet with any thing which they can't comprehend, they presently cry out, Contradiction and Absurdity, and think themselves acquitted from any Obligation of assenting to it; as if they look'd upon it as an Infringement of the Liberty and Property of such free rational Agents as they are, to have any thing impos'd upon them, as a necessary Article of Belief, which their own Capacities can't fully comprehend. Hence they are for making neither Scripture, nor Tradition, but their own conceited Phancy, many times in Opposition to both, the Rule of their Faith, with which they are very careful not to overburthen themselves, but are for reducing all the *Credenda* of Christianity into a very narrow Compass, to one or two Articles at the most; as hath been attempted by one of the most admir'd Philosophers of that licentious Age and Nation wherein we live, thereby making Faith indeed, in some Sense, though very different from that of our Saviour,

like a Grain of Mustard-Seed, viz. Not in Quality, but Quantity.

And as they are but for a little Faith, so that they may seem at least in some Measure consistent with themselves, they are not for many Works, lest there should be more than they are able of their own Strength to bear, and consequently must be forced to own their Obligation to some other Coadjutor for his Assistance, to enable them to perform their necessary Duty, which they might possibly think too great a Reflection upon their noble Nature; and therefore judging themselves sufficient for the whole Duty in Man, they make no scruple to exclude the third Person in the ever blessed Trinity out of the World, without whose Assistance all good Christians are willing to acknowledge, that they *can do no manner of Thing that is good.*

'Tis true indeed, they are for assenting to such Truths, and performing such Duties, as natural Reason would have preached to them; but if the Scripture it self requires any thing more of them, they can hardly think themselves obliged to it, especially if they cannot of themselves give a very good Reason for it.

Thus for instance, because they can't see how the Eating of Bread, or Drinking of Wine, which are the proper Food of the Body, can nourish the Soul, or confer Grace; or how the Sprinkling a little Water upon the Body, can wash away the Pollution of the Soul, they presently conclude one of the Christian Sacraments to be barely Commemorative, and the other to be an unnecessary Circumstance of Religion: So because they can't see how or why the Posterity of Adam should be concerned in his Fall, they can easily acquit themselves and others of the Guilt of Original Sin: And because they can't, as they pretend, see any Reason why momentary Sins should be punish'd with Eternal Torments, they comfortably conclude,

clude, that the Punishments of the Damn'd will be but Temporary: So again, Because they can't see any necessity for a numerical Resurrection, nor account for the manner of bringing it about, they think they may safely blot that Article out of the Creed too. Then as for the Holy Orders of the Ministry, such as Christ conferr'd upon his Apostles, and commanded them and their Successors to confer upon others *to the End of the World*; they have so mean a Notion of them, that truly they can't see why the Clerk of the Parish may not upon Occasion change Places with his Master, or the Mayor of the Town separate for the Ministry, as well as the Bishop of the Diocess.

These and many others of a like Stamp, are the wild Notions which these great Pretenders to Reason and Philosophy have borrow'd from the antient Hereticks, (for there is scarce one of them which they can properly call their own) and endeavour to infect the World with, under the specious Titles of manly Opinions, and rational Principles of Religion. How great a Party these two Sects of vain Pretenders to Philosophy, in opposition to sound Reason, orthodox Theology, and divine Revelation, make, or may make, if not timely prevented by the pious Prudence of our Legislators, and the more powerful Interposition of Divine Providence, is too Melancholy a Theme for me to enlarge upon. Sure I am, that the bold and open Insults which have been made of late by them upon reveal'd Religion, make it very reasonable and requisite for the Ministers of the Gospel to take all fitting Occasions to press home upon their Auditors, that most admirable Exhortation of the Apostle in my Text, *Beware lest any Man spoil you through Philosophy and vain Deceit.* In Discoursing upon which Words I shall,

First,

First, Consider what kind of Philosophy that is, which the Apostle here cautions the *Colossians* against.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to persuade you not to be seduced, or spoiled by such kind of Philosophy, by clearing the Principles and Mysteries of our most Holy Religion from the foul Aspersions of *Atheistical* and *Socinian* Pretenders to Philosophy; and shewing the Weakness, Folly and Vanity, as well as the bold Presumption of their manner of Philosophizing.

And *First* of the *First*. After the Apostle had Admonished the *Colossians* to beware of Impostors, *lest they should beguile them with inticeing Words*, importing things, which tho' they might look like Truth, yet at the same Time were very far from being so, he proceeds to reckon up some of the various kinds of Impostures; to the First of which he gives the Title of Philosophy, and then immediately adds such Words as plainly shew what kind of Philosophy he meant, *viz.* such as is vain and fallacious. And indeed had he not been pleased thus to explain himself; yet could it not be reasonably supposed that he had intended any other: For as for true and sound Philosophy, whether Natural or Moral, 'tis plain, that could not be here meant by the Apostle; such Philosophy being the Off-spring of right Reason, which is imprinted on our Minds by God himself; and consequently to reject true and genuine Philosophy, would be to reject Reason it self; which could not be done without reflecting either upon the Wisdom or the Goodness of the Beneficent Author of our Being, for making it the distinguishing Property of our Nature. Besides, sound Philosophy and good Learning may, and ought to be so manag'd, as to be very useful even in Matters of Religion, particularly for the clear Understanding, and perspicuous

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Explication of many difficult Passages of Holy Scripture; for tho' all the *Credenda* and *Agenda* of Religion are so plainly set forth therein, that even he that runs may read them; yet I believe, every ones own Experience may sufficiently convince him of the Truth of what St. Peter, (2 Ep. ch. 3. v. 16.) long ago observed, viz. That there are also some *svovonta*, or things, hard to be understood, which the ignorant, or unlearned, may be apt to wrest to their own Destruction: and which can't be fully Understood, or clearly Explain'd, without the Assistance of human Learning, or Philosophy.

Secondly, Philosophy, especially that Part of it which teaches us the Art and Rules of Reasoning well, is very necessary in all the controverted Points of Religion. For tho' we must believe many Things which are above our Reason, yet this must not be done rashly and without due Consideration, but we must consult our Reason upon some Accounts even in these Sublime Matters: For tho' Scripture be the Rule of our Faith, yet 'tis Reason which must teach, us what those great and necessary Truths are which are either expressly contain'd in it, or may fairly and evidently be deduced from it. Thus, for instance, we believe the mysterious Doctrine of the ever blessed Trinity, which tho' infinitely above our Reason, yet is by no means contrary to it; our Reason shewing us, that it is plainly revealed in Holy Scripture, which doth not only assert the Unity of the Godhead, and the Divinity of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost; but doth also plainly ascribe to each of these three blessed Persons all the Essential Attributes of the Divine Nature: On the contrary, we do not believe the absurd Doctrine of Transubstantiation, our Reason shewing us, that this being a flat Contradiction both to the Senses and Reason of Mankind, neither is, nor can be contained in that un-erring Rule

Rule which God has given us to walk by; and consequently, that those Words from which some would infer it, cannot be meant in a literal, but must, as they very well may, be understood in a figurative Sense only.

Indeed, the Apostle is so far from disallowing a modest use of Reason in Matters of Religion, *which is our reasonable service*, that as we often find him making use of Arguments drawn from it even in Points of Faith and Doctrine, so he seems plainly to require it of us also. Thus, *Eph. 5. v. 17.* He Exhorts us *not to be unwise, but to understand what the Will of the Lord is*, and *ch. 4. v. 14.* of the same Epistle, he Admonisheth us *to be no longer Children, carried about with every wind of Doctrine*; but we must, according to his Direction, *1 Thess. ch. 5. v. 21. Prove all things*, that so we may be able, (as we are advised ~~in~~ in another place) *to give an Answer to every one that asks us a reason of the hope that is in us.* Add to this, that there is nothing, Scripture only excepted, which can give us more clear Idea's, and lively Representations of the Divine Perfections, than a clear Insight, or Examination into the Nature and Causes of Things; which we call natural Philosophy. Lastly, not to insist any longer upon the Proof of a Thing which is so very plain; True and sound Philosophy is very useful and requisite to enable us to encounter and confute all such bold and arrogant Pretenders to it, as are so vain as to think themselves able to argue from it, against Scripture and revealed Religion. It cannot therefore be imagined, that the Apostle should here endeavour to dissuade us from the Study of true Philosophy, but only from suffering our selves to be imposed upon by the gross Errors of some vain Pretenders to it; such as those false Apostles the *Gnosticks* (or Men of Knowledge as they had the Vanity to stile themselves, who pretending to more Understanding than ordinary, *had quite forsaken the Faith*

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of *Christ*) endeavour'd to obtrude upon the *Colossians*, as about the *Worship of Angels*, about the Creation of the World, and the Fabulous Pedigrees of the Gods under the Name of *Eones*, &c. partly perhaps taken from the Platonick Philosophy, and partly the Inventions of their own Brains. No, 'tis plain that it is not Philosophy properly so stiled, but as he else-where speaks, *Science falsely so called*; it is not Philosophy it self, but the vain Deceit of it, which *St. Paul* here cautions us against. For vain and deceitful it must needs prove, when it ventures out of its proper Sphere, and pretends to intermeddle so far in Matters of Religion, as either to deduce the Fundamentals of it from its own Maxims, or to oppose those Principles which are True in the common Order of Nature to Theological ones, which are above Reason, or Dogmatically to determine about such Matters as cannot properly be judged of by meer natural Reason; such as are the most acceptable Manner of Divine Worship, the Means of God's Reconciliation to us, the Sacred Mysteries of our Religion, and all those Matters of Faith, which depending entirely upon the good Will and Pleasure of our Heavenly Father revealed to us, are not to be sought for in our own Brains, but in his Divine Word. For as we are to render unto Reason the Things that are Reason's, so if we will be just to God or our selves, we must also give unto Faith the Things that are Faith's. Because in those sublime Matters which are above the Reach of human Reason, and depend only upon the good Will of God revealed in Scripture, it cannot possibly of it self produce any thing which we can safely and with certainty depend upon; but in pretending to it, must necessarily prove it self vain and fallacious, and lead its Followers into many dangerous Mistakes.

Thus we see, that there may be Hereticks in Philosophy, as well as in Religion; that Tares may spring up in the Schools, as well as in the Church; and consequently,

that the Philosophy of some Men, may be as vain as the Religion of others. Not without great Reason therefore, did the Apostle exhort the *Colossians* to beware lest any Man should deceive, spoil, or rob them of the Principles of their Religion, or seduce them from the Purity and Simplicity of it, under the specious and deceitful Pretence of Philosophy.

A Caution as needful for our wise Age, as that of the Apostle, wherein 'tis to be fear'd, we may find some Men vain enough to affect the Imputation of Heresie, or even of Atheism it self, in Hopes thereby to be mistaken for Philosophers, who, under Pretence of a greater Share of Knowledge, and deeper Insight into Philosophy, and the Nature of Things, than the rest of Mankind, take the Liberty not only to call in Question, but openly to declaim against, not only the sacred Mysteries of the Christian, but the great Fundamental of all Religion in general, as contradictory to the Principles of Natural Reason, and consequently, not to be believ'd by rational Agents.

Now these are either profess'd Atheists, or pretended Unitarians; the former being for no Religion at all; the latter, for as little as may be; these the Disciples of the philosophical *Hobbes*; these the Followers and Admirers of the Reasoning *Socinus*, both pretending to be wise, and despising others. But with what little Reason, I shall now proceed to consider under my

Second general Head, in which I proposed to expose the Vanity of these Mens Philosophy, by clearing the Principles and Mysteries of our Holy Religion, from those foul Aspersions which they have cast upon them; which may, I hope, prove sufficient to dissuade any ingenuous Minds from following, or being misled by them.

To begin then with the Former, who tho' they were deservedly reckoned the *Fools* of *David's* time, yet would
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willingly be thought the greatest Wits of ours, viz. those who say in their hearts there is no God; pretending, tho' in contradiction to the universal Consent of the Wilest of Men in all Nations, and in all Ages of the World, in opposition to the Light of Nature, and I am afraid, very often, to the Dictates of their own Consciences, that 'tis absolutely impossible for Mankind to frame any Notion of an Immaterial Substance, and that any thing should be Infinite, Eternal, and necessarily Self-existent, is what they can by no Means find in their Hearts to conceive, it being, as they say, absolutely impossible to apprehend how any thing should exist without a Cause, or be the Cause of its own Existence; and therefore, with as much Modesty as Reason, conclude, That there can be no such Being, but that all things came by Chance, and that all those Changes and Varieties which we see in the World, are but the Results of a continual Scuffle of material Particles.

Very philosophically contriv'd! But are these Men of Wit and Reason in good Earnest, when they talk at this Rate? Are they really perswaded of the Truth of what they would impose upon others? And are they resolved to believe nothing which their own Brains cannot fully comprehend, must the Difficulty of conceiving the Nature of a thing, necessarily conclude against the Existence of it? If so, they must be forc'd every Day they live, to deny their Senses, out of pure Complement to their Understanding, and confess, that they never saw or felt any such thing as Matter in their Lives.

For who can frame to himself so clear a Notion, even of extended Matter it self, as to free it from all the Difficulties and Intricacies, with which the Extension of it is perplexed? For, this extended Matter must consist, either of Atoms, strictly so call'd, or of Particles infinitely divisible: The former, viz. That any Part of

Matter that is extended into Length, Breadth, and Thickness, should yet be conceiv'd to be indivisible, is what I think, I may safely pronounce to be utterly impossible. And yet the latter is not much less difficult to be understood. For nothing can be divisible into Parts it has not; if therefore any Body or Portion of Matter be divisible into infinite extended Parts, it must consist of infinite extended Parts; and one wou'd think, that what is made up of infinite extended Parts, must be infinitely extended it self: One Consequence of which would be, that the most minute Body in the World, would be as infinitely extended as the whole Mass of Matter, and any Part of that Body as infinitely extended as the whole; which things are as hard Mysteries, at least to my Imagination, as any thing in the Notion of an incorporeal Substance can be to theirs; and yet, I presume they would reckon me little better than a mad Man, should I deny the Existence of Matter, and consequently, believe, that there is nothing else Spirit in the World, merely upon the Account of these Difficulties.

What an inconsiderate piece of Folly then must it needs be, scornfully to reject any commonly received Truth, only for seeming to be clouded with some Difficulties and Intricacies of Conception, since that of whose Existence we have the most sensible Demonstration, is as intangled and perplex'd in the conceiving, as any thing that can be propounded to our Imagination. Well, but after all, are these Virtuoso's sure that they can have no Notion of an infinite, eternal, and self-existent Being? Surely no, 'tis impossible; they must be forc'd, after all, whether they will or no, to acknowledge the quite contrary, and own either God or the World to be such, and the Intricaey of the latter, will be as great as that of the former: For they can't, according to their own Principles, pretend that it was made in time,

time, because then it will be necessary for them to allow some pre-existing Being that must make it, which can be no other than an Omnipotent Creatour, unless they can be so fortiff as to imagine that it came by Chance; but then they must allow this Chance to be something real (since nothing can produce no Effect) and then Necessity will oblige them to allow this Chance to be Eternal, unless they can suppose this Chance to have been begotten by some elder Chance: But then they must still go on till they come to the same thing; so that, tho' they will not allow God to be Eternal, because they can't conceive how he should be so, yet they must be forc'd to allow Matter, or something else to be so, and so give those Attributes to that, which they deny God, as inconceivable.

Let us see then, in the next Place, how this Supposition of the Eternity of Matter will stand the Test of Reason and Philosophy. Imagining therefore, Matter to be eternal, they must necessarily suppose either *Motion* or *Rest*, or a Power of moving or not moving it self, naturally to belong to it. If they suppose Motion to be natural to Matter, it being allow'd by the Materialists themselves to be uniform, and of one Kind, as to its Substance or Essence; they must likewise suppose every distinct Particle of it to be continually in Motion, and to be alike moved; for, if Motion be essential to Matter, it must be alike in every Part of it; so that every Part of it being alike, and moved alike, and consequently, there being no Prevalency at all in any one Particle of it above another, it could never have produced any Variety of Phœnomena in Nature at all, much less, those curious and wonderful ones, which we are daily Spectators and Admirers of; but every Particle of Matter being in perpetual Motion, as it must be, if Motion be essential to it, all the Matter of the Universe must have remained for ever,

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one most subtle Fluid, and no two Particles of it could ever have been condensated and hung together, as we see they do, in much larger Quantities, in all solid Bodies; and therefore, must conclude, that it has its Motion, not from it self, but from some higher and more noble Principle. But if, on the other Hand, they will say, that Motion is not essential to Matter, as it is plain indeed, that it is not; then must they of Necessity allow it to be moved and actuated by some other Agent; and what this can be, but that immense Spirit which is continually present in every Quarter of the Universe, to order and dispose every thing in it as he sees fit, let them discover when they shall find themselves more at Leisure to do it, than they have hitherto appeared to be.

But, if to avoid these Inconveniencies, they shall think fit to assign to Matter, a kind of discretionary Power of moving or not moving it self, as Occasion shall require, then must they also allow it to have some Kind of Knowledge or Thought belonging to it; and if so, they must acknowledge this Thought to be either essential or only accidental to it; if the former, then must every Particle of Matter have its Share of it, and the most sluggish Block might be as thoughtful as these great Philosophers themselves, who, I suppose, have a better Opinion of themselves, than to allow such a Comparison. And yet I can't see how they can make it a meer Mode, or Accident of Matter, because the Nature of Accidents is such, that though we may conceive the Subject of them, without having any Conception of themselves at the same time, yet we can never conceive the Accidents of any Subject, without having some Conception, at the same time, of the Subject to which they do belong: But now we may have a clear and distinct Conception of Thought, without having any Conception at All of Matter at the same time to which it should belong, but can,
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and must conceive it to belong to something very different from it.

So great is the Folly, so weak the Reasoning, and so vain the Philosophy of these vain Pretenders to it, who, presuming upon the Strength of their own private Judgments, and one would think, the Weakness of every Bodies else, endeavour to propagate such silly, incoherent Opinions, as they can't pretend to maintain, without offering palpable Violence to their own Faculties, making all the rest of the World the Complement of being Fools, and boldly fighting against God himself.

I might easily produce several other Instances of the Vanity of these Mens Philosophy, but I shall at present content my self with what has been already observed, hoping that may prove sufficient to convince any Man of common Sense, of the Folly of those vain Men, who pretend to justify their Unbelief of the main Fundamental of all Religion in general, by Reason and Philosophy.

I come now therefore, in the next Place, to examine the Philosophy of that other Sect of Pretenders to it, before-mentioned, who, though they own the God that made them, and all his Attributes, except Omniscience, which they think fit to stint and limit; yet take Leave to deny his eternally begotten Son, the Lord that redeemed them, who pretend, at least, to own the Authority of the Holy Scriptures, and yet make bold, not only to call in Question, but to deny the greatest Mysteries of Religion contained in them, they being, as they make no Scruple to assert, contradictory to true Reason and Philosophy; and though perhaps, if we examine Matters thoroughly, we shall find, that all the Reason these great Pretenders have to vilifie and condemn these Divine Truths, is, That their shallow Noddles can't fully comprehend the Nature and the *Modus* of them, which Consideration alone would be enough to make any true
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and modest Reasoner silent in the Case. For if these be such things as we don't understand the Nature of, we may imagine a thousand Absurdities and Contradictions which are wholly owing to our Ignorance of Things, and to be found only in our weak Conceptions. But having shew'd already, that we do, and must believe the Existence of things, whose intimate Natures we can't comprehend, they being clouded with such Difficulties, and Intricacies of Conception, as we can by no Means solve or extricate our selves from; having shew'd, I say, that we must believe such Things, or else we must believe nothing at all, there being hardly any thing in the World, whose Nature and Essence we can be sure we thoroughly understand; I shall now beg Leave to lay down this one Axiom of Christian Philosophy, which no Man, professing Christianity (as these Philosophers do) provided they do but believe what they profess, can deny, viz. That whatsoever is clearly revealed in holy Scripture, is certainly true, *all Scripture being given by Inspiration from God*; and consequently, *If an Angel from Heaven should pretend to preach any other Doctrine in Opposition to it, we may securely, nay, we are obliged, having good Authority so to do, to reject it; with much greater Reason surely, may we condemn the Ignorance, Pride, Presumption, and Impudence of that bold conceited Mortal, who shall pretend to Reason and Philosophize in Opposition and Contradiction to these Divine Oracles, and not without the greatest Reason imaginable, pronounce that Man's Philosophy, how specious so ever it may appear, to be vain and fallacious.*

Let us now therefore see, whether those Mysteries, which these bold Pretenders to Reason asperse as contradictory to it, be plainly contained in the Sacred Writings of the Divinely inspired Pen-men. To begin then with the Doctrine of the Holy and Ever-blessed Trinity,

Trinity, which they scornfully reject as the most absurd Contradiction, and we believe to be the most profound Mystery of the Christian Religion. That there is but *One God*, is the plainest and most allowed Principle of Revealed as well as Natural Religion; and yet, that the Name or Title of God is expressly given, not only to the Father, but also to the Son, and Holy Ghost in holy Scripture, is what these great Philosophers themselves do not think fit to deny; and that this Title is not given to them only, in a figurative or lower, as they pretend, but in a true and proper Sense, we have this plain and evident Reason to believe, *viz.* That the same infallible Divine Writings ascribe all the essential and incommunicable Attributes of the Divine Nature particularly to each of them. Now, He to whom the essential Attributes of God do truly and properly belong, can be no other than the true God; for if these Attributes of God may belong to any other Being besides Himself, then they cannot be said to be essential to himself, since the Essence of a Thing is that which constitutes the Nature of it, and distinguisheth it from all other things whatsoever, inasmuch, that to separate a Thing from its Essence, is all one as to separate it from its self. Since therefore, all the essential Attributes of the Divine Nature are particularly ascribed to each of the Three Persons of the Ever-blessed Trinity in holy Scripture, and consequently, do truly belong to them, we must conclude that whatever other Distinction there may be between the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, they are still essentially one and the same *true God over all blessed for evermore.*

So that though this great Mystery, as to the *Modus* of it, be above the short Reach of our shallow Capacities to comprehend, (and indeed, if it were not, it would be so far from being the greatest, that it would be no Mystery at all) and though *Flesh and Blood could never have*

revealed it unto us, as our Saviour told St. Peter, when he made that eminent Profession of his Divinity, *Matth.* 16. v. 16, 17. Yet since God himself has been pleased to reveal this great Mystery to us in his own infallible Word, that Man will shew himself to be a very bold, but at the same time, a very vain Pretender to Philosophy, who shall venture to deny it, meerly because 'tis out of the Depth of his shallow Comprehension. For what is this, but to be dogmatical, to say no worse, about a thing which he himself confesses he can't understand?

Now, as for those Passages of Holy Scripture which relate to the Truth of this mysterious Article of our Religion, as they are too numerous to be particularly cited by me at present, so are they, I think, too obvious to be overlooked by any diligent Peruser of those Sacred Volumes, which may, I hope, excuse my troubling either you or my self with the Enumeration of them at this time.

Well, but perhaps they may tell us that those Passages of Holy Scripture which mention, or by necessary Consequence seem to infer, the Divinity of the Son and Holy Ghost, are not so plain and expresse, as our dull Trinitarians pretend, but have been very much misinterpreted by them, it being impossible that any such thing as a Contradiction, as they roundly declare this to be, should be clearly asserted in the Scriptures; and consequently, that 'tis very modest, as well as reasonable, to suppose, That the Four first General Councils, the Primitive Fathers of the Church; in a word, the Generality of the dull Christian World for these 1600 Years and upwards, either through want of Sense, Learning or Honesty, have misinterpreted and endeavour'd to impose upon the World by their Expositions of these Places, which have never been rightly understood, or sincerely interpreted by any, but only some few such choice Wits and

Well-

Well-meaning Persons, as *Cerintbus*, *Ebion*, *Paulus Samosetanus*, *Photinus*, *Petrus Abælardus*, *Servetus*, the *Socinus's*, and their Followers, who scorn to interpret Scripture according to the old dull Way of Lexicon, and the natural and proper Signification of Words or Phrases, as Men interpret other Writings, but by their own Phancy in Opposition to all these, by private Revelation, which they must pretend, or nothing, to make out some of their Expositions, and now and then setting up the *Syriack* in Opposition to the *Greek* Testament, (that is, in humble Imitation of the *Jesuites*, preferring the Copy before the Original) as if the Evangelists and Apostles who wrote the New Testament in *Greek*, did not understand their Masters or their own Meaning, as well as the *Syriack* Translator.

Well, but is it necessary that the Primitive Fathers, who differ from these Wits in their Sense of Scripture, must be either Fools or Knaves? Must their Interpretations of these Places proceed from Want of Sense, Learning, or Honesty? Let us consider then in which they were deficient, and which could be the Cause of their Mistake: Was it for Want of Sense or Learning to understand the Scriptures? No surely, they will not pretend to be so little acquainted with Books, as to charge them with Insufficiency upon this Account, unless peradventure, they can suppose that those learned Volumes which bear their Names, were wrote by some Body else; doubtless great Friends of theirs, in order to establish their Credit in the World, and make them famous to Posterity; which yet they may as well suppose as the other. For they must either call in Question the Truth and Sincerity, and deny the Authority of all the Historians who wrote in or about those Times, or else they must acknowledge, That the Primitive Christians, and consequently the Antient Fathers, who were the most

Eminent of them, were Men of the greatest Purity, Sincerity and Integrity, that ever adorn'd the Christian World.

But besides, What Design could they have in imposing such a Doctrin^e, supposing it false, upon the World! They could not hope to gain either Money or Profelytes by it. As for the former, 'tis plain it could have no tendency to that; if it had, in all probability, the Church of *Rome*, who makes as much of her Doctrines as may be, would not have been so negligent as she has hitherto been in making that Use of it. And as to the latter, (according to the *Socinians* own Principles) it was the most unlikely Means imaginable to gain them, there being, as they alledge (how truly I will not determine) no greater Stumbling-block in the way of *Jews* and *Gentiles*, whose Conversion was the great Work of those Fathers, than the Doctrine of the Trinity, which according to them is such a Contradiction, as a Man must renounce his Reason before he can believe it: As if all the Christian World, except an Handful or two of Hereticks, were meer Sots and Ideots. No, 'tis plain, there are, and ever have been, a sufficient Number of Men professing the Orthodox Faith of the Holy Catholick Church, who have been able, by Strength of Argument, to defend it against all Opposers whatsoever; who have as far excelled their Adversaries in sound Reason and good Literature, as they have been outdone by them in Face and Impudence, which is the most serviceable Part of their Philosophy, and many times serves instead of Argument. And that these Professors and Defenders of the Catholick Faith, were as sincere in this mysterious one, as in any other Article of their Creed, is what we can have no Reason at all to question; which thing alone would be a kind of Argument to me, if there were no other, that the Doctrine of the Trinity is not so palpable a Contradiction

as these vain Philosophers would make it. It being very difficult, if not impossible, to conceive how any Man in his Senses can give a firm Assent to, or sincerely believe a manifest Contradiction, that is, what he knows to be so.

But besides, tho' we can't comprehend this great Mystery of a Trinity in Unity, so as exactly to determine the *Modus* of it, and how it must be; (for it would be no Mystery if we could) yet since it is, and must be allow'd by all considering Men, that One may be Three and Three may be One in a different Respect; this I think is sufficient to clear it from that bold and unreasonable Charge of Contradiction, which has so inconsiderately been brought against it by these vain Pretenders to Reason and Philosophy. And indeed, what greater Argument can there be of the Vanity of any Man's Philosophy than to be, even in opposition to Divine Revelation, dogmatical in a thing of which he understands so little, than to pretend to determine what is, and what is not a Contradiction in the Nature of those things, which he himself must confess he can't understand or comprehend?

Having said thus much of this most mysterious Article of our holy Faith, I might now proceed to some others, which the free Thinkers of this reasoning Age take the Liberty to philosophize against, and shew, that how much soever they may be above our Reason, yet they are by no Means contrary to it, and therefore being plainly revealed in Holy Scripture, ought as firmly to be believed by us. But I am afraid that I have trespassed too much upon your Patience already; and therefore shall only beg Leave to add a Word or two by way of Application, to those promising and hopeful Youths, upon whose Account we are now assembled, and who are now happily improving themselves in the Knowledge of the Languages under One who is so compleat a Master of them himself, and is, and has been for many Years so diligent

diligent and successful an Instructor of others in them, that I can't help thinking, that it will be too much their own Faults, if any of them should fail to answer the End and Expectations of their kind Relations, in sending them hither.

You have heard that it is not true Philosophy or humane Learning, that the Apostle here cautions the *Colossians* against. He was too great a Master of that himself, and too well acquainted with the Excellency and Usefulness of it, either to despise it himself, or wholly to discourage others from the Study of it; he knew it by Experience to be a great Improvement, and a delightful Entertainment of the Mind of Man, and that it might, with a wise and prudent Conduct, be very serviceable even to Religion it self; it was therefore only the vain Deceit and Abuse of it which he condemned; from which there is nothing so likely to secure you, as a thorough Knowledge of the thing it self, and therefore, the Consideration of what he here says in the Text should be so far from discouraging you in the Pursuit of true Philosophy, or any Studies that are subservient to it, that it should rather excite and quicken your Diligence in the Prosecution thereof.

You are now learning those Languages in which the Learning and Wisdom of the Antient Sages is lock'd up; without which, you cannot consequently expect to arrive at the thorough Knowledge of their Philosophy; and tho' perhaps, you may think this a dry and crabbed Study, yet remember that 'tis in order to qualify your selves for the more useful, easie, and delightful Study of Philosophy it self, which will as well reward, as it doth deserve your utmost Diligence and Industry; the Beauty of which will adorn you, the Sweetness whereof will please you, so as to leave on your Minds a perpetual Relish and Satisfaction.

But

But that I may the more effectually persuade you to pursue your present Studies with Diligence and Alacrity, let me recommend to your Imitation the Examples of those ingenious and learned Gentlemen, who have surmounted all the Difficulties of them, and have gone through your School before you, and many of them since that, through the more learned Schools of Philosophy it self, and are now kindly permitting their respective Countries to share with them in the happy Advantages of their learned Education, whilst others of them are still studying the Sciences, with no less Credit and Reputation than Pleasure and Delight in the neighbouring University, of which I have the Satisfaction of knowing some of them to be no mean Ornaments; and to which I hope, many of you will make Hast to follow them with such a Stock of Classcal Learning as may still keep up that Reputation which your School has so deservedly got in that learned Body, where you will soon learn to argue better than to despise Philosophy and human Learning, meerly because some vain Pretenders to it, either out of Ignorance or Design, have made an ill Use of it, and endeavoured to pervert it to wicked Purposes. For that would be too far to mimick the illogical Romanists in their unreasonable way of arguing, when from the accidental Abuse of a thing, they would infer the Unlawfulness of its Use, and because some unwary, or *unlearned* Men, as St. Peter speaks, *Wrest the Scriptures to their own Destruction*, forbid them to be read by any; tho', by the same sort of Logick, when their Hands were in, they might as reasonably prescribe a perpetual Fast to be observ'd in their Church, and so starve the Bodies as well as the Souls of their People, and prove Eating and Drinking to be unlawful, because some Men are Gluttons, and others Winebibbers.

There, I say, you will soon be taught to argue at an other rate, and will, I hope, consequently be so far from neglect,

neglecting or despising Philosophy, upon the Account of its having been abused by some vain Pretenders to it, that you will rather be the more diligent upon that very Account to make your selves such thorough Masters of it, as that you may be enabled thereby to put to Silence the Ignorance of such foolish and wicked Men, as shall go about to argue you out of your Religion towards God, or, which is a considerable Part of it, your Loyalty towards his Vicegerent, meerly upon the Account of the Difficulty of conceiving some Points of the former, or some Inconvenience which may possibly arise from the steady Practice of the latter.

There you will learn to distinguish between the Principles of meer Natural and Reveal'd Religion; and that tho' Reason alone may teach us the former, yet the latter depending entirely upon God's good Will and Pleasure, can be learnt only from what he has been pleas'd to reveal to us in Holy Scripture; the Study of which I must therefore above all other Books recommend to you, as containing in it that most excellent System of Divine Philosophy *which was once delivered to the Saints, and which alone is able to make you wise unto Salvation.*

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

PAge 4. Line 12. instead of *in* read *of*; p. 7. l. 7. r. *Supernatural*; p. 12. l. 19. add *but*; p. 15. l. 30. dele *and*.

